

PERFORATED INITIALS AND SLOPER'S PATENT, 1869

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An interesting group of letters, dealing with the early use of perforated initials on British stamps, may be found in "The Times" under various dates in January 1869.

An exhaustive article by Mr Bertram McGowan appeared in recent numbers of the British Philatelist on the "O.U.S" and other overprints, used by certain firms in order to so mark their stamps that they could easily be identified in case of theft. In that article (XIX, 28) Mr McGowan mentions that the perforation of initials, done under a patent of Messrs. J. Sloper & Co., gradually superseded the overprinting of stamps.

The first letter appears in a column of City gossip, and follows a word or two of introduction supplied by the column-writer.

January 22, 1869

The following relates to a method which is gradually coming into use for the prevention of robberies of postage stamps:

Walbrook House, E.C., Jan. 18.

Sir, - Several letters appeared in "The Times" of the 6th and 7th inst., complaining of irregularities of the Post Office in the delivery of letters. As the subject is one of vital importance to the trading community, I hope to be allowed to show that the fault in most instances lies in another direction than with the Post Office, and how it may be remedied. "M.B." one of the correspondents of The Times, suggests possibly the stamps may prove the temptation. I am very certain that stamps do prove the temptation, and that large firms and companies are great losers thereby. In this respect a case may be cited that came before the Manchester magistrates last year, when a person was convicted of receiving 7,000 postage and receipt stamps amounting to £35 19s 2d., from office boys and junior

clerks who had stolen them. Some of these stamps had been removed from letters, etc., afterwards destroyed, and others were quite new, not having been used. Many firms who have suffered from depredations of this sort have written to the Post Office on the subject and a plan which gives the public every security has been devised and submitted to, and received the entire approval of, the authorities who have recommended its general use.

This plan, the machines for which are my own invention, is to perforate the postage stamps with the initials of the person using them, which renders the stamps with the initials of the person using them, which renders the stamp useless except to the owners, and prevents the sale of them to stamp vendors and others. In their printed instructions issued to newsagents and receiving houses throughout the Kingdom, the Post-Office have strongly recommended its adoption as the most effectual means of preventing the fraudulent removal of stamps.

I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

Joseph Sloper

There must have been a real necessity for some sort of deterrent to theft of postage stamps, for a few days later Joseph Sloper writes again, as follows:-

Sir, - As several firms have applied at the branch post offices for the purpose of having their postage stamps perforated on my system with their initials, as authorised by the Post Office, will you kindly allow me to state that all applications for postage stamps to be so perforated should be made to the manager's offices, and not at the Post Office Branches?

Sloper's Patents, Walbrook House, E.C.,

Your most obedient servant,

Joseph Sloper

I have seen an interesting variety which showed both preventatives – the overprinting on the back (that of the Fore Street Warehouse Co., Ltd.) and the perforated initials. This was a copy of the One Shilling, plate 5, and the variety would doubtless be brought into being when that firm changed their system of stamps perforation.

[Ed:- Can anyone provide information as to what this perfin might have been? Fore Street Warehouse was a major user of perfins with F3970.02 being recorded used from 1880-1895. Two underprint types are listed by Gibbons as shown below. The period of use of the underprints certainly appears to overlap the use of perfins.]

THE
FORE STREET
WAREHOUSE COY.
(Limited.)

Type 24 (Small Limited)

THE
FORE STREET
WAREHOUSE COY.
(Limited.)

Type 24A (Large Limited)

It is not surprising that Sloper's useful idea rapidly "caught on" for the protective purpose must have been almost realised; and too, it must be admitted that the earliest examples of perforated initials are strikingly neat and of good appearance. The obliquely placed "Travers" (quite common) is a case in point. I am reminded that in a friend's collection there is a pair of One Penny 1864 with this same perforation, "Travers". Both are obliterated with the London type oval of bars, the letter "H" in a diamond. This I believe, is one of the yet unidentified British cancellations, but generally thought to have been used on mail of foreign origin, and probably impressed by a packet-boat postal clerk. If this is so, how can the perforated initials be accounted for?

The last letter of the present series, though probably written by an economically-minded Aberdonian, is interesting enough to be given here. It is from "The Times" of January 30, 1869:

Sir,- If the Post Office authorities have sanctioned the perforation of postage stamps by firms as a check on stealing for re-sale, perhaps they would allow private individuals to pass a simple stroke of the pen across the stamp and on to the envelope. No one would buy a stamp so marked as a matter of taste. On suggesting this to a friend, I am informed that this is allowed in India, and not objected to on the delivery of letter here. We are ordered to obliterate receipt stamps.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

J.C.

Stock Exchange, Montreal